

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

September 24, 2020

Mr. Joseph V. Cuffari
Inspector General
Department of Homeland Security
Office of Inspector General
Washington, D.C. 20528

Dear Mr. Cuffari,

We write today concerning sensationalized reports regarding the treatment of detainees at the Irwin County Detention Center in Ocilla, Georgia. Recent developments indicate that the allegations included in the complaint made to your office by Dawn Wooten, represented by Project South, are questionable at best. We hope that your office will consider the recently reported facts disputing Ms. Wooten's allegations, and shedding light on Project South's radical, anti-law enforcement agenda, as you continue your investigation.

As you know, Ms. Wooten and Project South issued a complaint on September 14, 2020, alleging that mass hysterectomies were being performed on detainees at the Irwin County Detention Center (the "Center") and that "medical neglect" was taking place surrounding the Center's approach to the coronavirus pandemic.¹ Project South's complaint, which relied on several unsubstantiated, secondhand accounts and Ms. Wooten's own view of operations at the Center, was quickly refuted by individuals at both the Irwin County Hospital and Immigrations and Custom Enforcement (ICE) who have made clear that the group's claim of mass hysterectomies is unsupported by hospital and ICE records.² In fact, ICE released a statement on September 15, 2020, "vehemently disput[ing] the implication that detainees are used for experimental medical procedures".³ Despite these facts, Democrat Members of Congress and the media have seized on Ms. Wooten's claim that the doctor in question is a "uterus collector" who takes "all their uteruses out or he's taken their tubes out", leading congressional leaders to accept

¹ Project South, Georgia Detention Watch, Georgia Latino Alliance for Human Rights, and South Georgia Immigrant Support Network, *Re: Lack of Medical Care, Unsafe Work Practices, and Absence of Adequate Protection Against COVID-19 for Detained Immigrants and Employees Alike at the Irwin County Detention Center*, at 2 (Sept. 14, 2020) <https://projectsouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/OIG-ICDC-Complaint-1.pdf>. (hereinafter "Project South Complaint").

² Sinead Baker, *Hospital for ICE detention center accused of mass hysterectomies says it only carried out 2, casting doubt on allegations*, Business Insider (Sept. 23, 2020 at 7:18AM) (<https://www.businessinsider.com/hospital-2-hysterectomies-done-detained-woman-after-mass-operations-claims-2020-9>); Haven Orecchio-Egresitz, *A Georgia ICE detention center is no longer sending detained women to a doctor who some said didn't fully explain their procedures to them*, Insider (Sept. 23, 2020) (<https://www.insider.com/georgia-ice-detention-no-longer-using-dr-mahendra-amin-2020-9>).

³ Rick Jervis, *Alleged unwanted hysterectomies and other abuses at ICE facility prompts investigation*, USA Today (Sept. 17, 2020 at 8:41PM) (<https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2020/09/17/hysterectomies-immigrants-complaint-ice-and-detention-center-irwin-county/3482369001/>).

Project South's claims as fact, despite the increasing evidence demonstrating Ms. Wooten's claims are, at best, exaggerated and, at worst, completely fabricated.

Two days after the release of Project South's complaint, 173 Democrat Members of Congress, led by House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, wrote to you urging an immediate investigation, centering their call almost entirely on Ms. Wooten's claims that "mass hysterectomies" were taking place at the Center, equating the practice to eugenics.⁴ In light of the Democrats' unbridled acceptance of Ms. Wooten's claims as fact and their pressure on your office to take adverse action against the Center and the medical professionals involved, we believe it is critical we bring to your attention recent reports directly disputing Project South's and Ms. Wooten's "mass hysterectomy" claims.

On September 22, 2020, the Irwin County Hospital, the medical facility serving detainees at the Center, released a statement that the allegations made by Ms. Wooten and Project South "are disturbing and sensational, but are not supported by reality" and the doctor "is a longtime member of the Irwin County Hospital medical staff and has been in good standing for the entirety of his service to the Irwin County community."⁵ Further, ICE has reviewed its own records, showing that only two female detainees at the Center had been referred for hysterectomies since 2017.⁶ Importantly, such an invasive procedure requires inter-agency approval at ICE, specifically from a supervising medical officer who maintains records on such surgeries and referrals.

Despite Project South's other allegations, its claims of "mass hysterectomies" took center stage quickly after the complaint was issued. The group's attorney and lead investigator for the complaint verified that she had, in fact, not even spoken to or identified any detainee claiming to have undergone a hysterectomy, despite Ms. Wooten's claims she had spoken with "several inmates" who have "had hysterectomies" herself.⁷ Project South's failure to verify Ms. Wooten's claims regarding hysterectomies should call her allegations into question, and recent reports show that Ms. Wooten's claims were clearly exaggerated to spark outrage.

As you conduct your investigation, I hope you will also consider the motives behind the nonprofit at the center of Ms. Wooten's complaint – Project South. According to its website, Project South is "committed to ending the use of local police to enforce" what they characterize as "the federal government's draconian and racist immigration policies." Given the fact that Project South openly characterizes the U.S. government's immigration laws as "draconian" and "racist", it is safe to assume this organization has a vested interest in furthering Ms. Wooten's allegations in an effort to shut down the facility. In fact, Project South boasts a goal of "shutting down immigration centers", including their effort starting in 2017 to "reiterate the demand for both" the Stewart Detention Center and the Irwin County Detention Center – what they believe

⁴ Letter to Mr. Joseph V. Cuffari, Inspector General, Department of Homeland Security (Sept. 15, 2020) (<https://javalpal.house.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/DHS-IG-FINAL.pdf>).

⁵ Nick Miroff, *Hospital where activists say ICE detainees were subjected to hysterectomies says just two were performed there*, The Washington Post (Sept. 22, 2020 at 4:10PM) (https://www.washingtonpost.com/immigration/ice-detainee-hysterectomies-hospital/2020/09/22/aaf2ca7e-fcfd-11ea-830c-a160b331ca62_story.html).

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ *Project South Complaint* at 19.

to be “two of the worst immigration detention centers in the country” – be shut down.⁸ Project South’s website also boasts their “free legal representation” of immigrants under investigation by the Federal Bureau of Investigation’s (FBI) Joint Terrorism Task Forces and their “abolish ICE” agenda. Given their mission, it is abundantly clear that Project South’s number one objective is to bring attention to any claims – despite the fact that such claims may be fabricated – that may further their radical, anti-law enforcement agenda.

As your office continues investigating Ms. Wooten’s claims, we hope that you will consider not only the reports of Irwin County Hospital and ICE made available in response to Project South’s complaint, but also the clear motives persuading this organization to embrace Ms. Wooten’s claims without first verifying them. The legislature has a duty to the American people that it will take seriously any claims of government wrongdoing, abuse, and fraud, but Democrats have shown a willingness to spend every dime of taxpayer money they can to investigate claims that support their anti-ICE stance, no matter how unfounded or exaggerated they may be, just to lodge criticisms at the Trump Administration. Detention facilities like Irwin County Detention Center serve an important purpose in upholding and enforcing our nation’s immigration laws and we refuse to allow Democrats to shut them down by ignoring the facts in front of them.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Doug Collins', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Doug Collins
Member of Congress

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Austin Scott' in a cursive style.

Austin Scott
Member of Congress

⁸ See *Legal & Advocacy*, Project South (<https://projectsouth.org/legal-advocacy-work/>); *Sign the Petition: Shut Down the Irwin County Detention Center!*, The Action Network (<https://actionnetwork.org/petitions/sign-the-petition-demand-the-shut-down-irwin-county-detention-center?source=twitter>).